Several of the area’s most important visitor attractions can be visited on a short ride from Burscough, including the rich nature reserves at Martin Mere and Mere Sands Wood as well as Rufford Old Hall, a magnificent sixteenth-century house where a young William Shakespeare is believed to have performed; it’s now in the care of the National Trust.

**Arriving by train:** Burscough Bridge station (on the Wigan–Southport line) is the most convenient starting point but you can also use Burscough Junction (Preston-Ormskirk Line)

**Arriving by car:** Park in Burscough

Exit the station, either by Station Approach or by steps from the platform up to the A59. Turn left on the A59 then left again on Red Cat Lane. Follow this as it swings right and heads out into open country. Take the first lane on the right (Curlew Lane), about 1.5km from Burscough. Follow this to a T-junction and turn right, then follow the road round right as it reaches houses (Brick Kiln Lane) on the edge of Rufford. Follow this to its end, meeting the B5246. Turn right then first left on Flash Lane. Follow this to the A59. This is busy and there’s no cycle-lane, but it’s only about 200m to Rufford Old Hall (café).

Retrace down the A59; unfortunately Flash Lane is one-way, so continue on the A59 past a left turn on the B5246 (this leads to Rufford’s two canal marinas, both of which have cafés). Turn right on the B5246, Holmeswood Road.

After 1.3km turn left on a signed, stony track to Mere Sands Wood. This nature reserve is owned by The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside. Its mixed woodlands, meres and wetlands are a haven for wildlife - in the summer it’s a great place to see several species of dragonfly for instance. There’s a small visitor centre with toilets and drinks vending machines.

Return up the access track to the road and turn left. Where the road makes a sharp right turn, turn left on Sandy Way, then second right on Cross Meanygate. This provides a peaceful interlude before meeting another busier road at a T-junction, opposite Homestad Farm (café). Turn left and follow the road through several bends, passing Windmill Animal Farm (familiar and exotic animals, miniature railway, café) before arriving at the entrance to Martin Mere.

Once much of this land lay under the waters of a vast lake, of which the present Martin Mere is but a tiny remnant. Now run by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Martin Mere is one of the most important wildlife sites in the UK; as well as many passage migrants and familiar resident species, look out for the flamingos. Martin Mere is also home to a breeding pair of European beavers, recently reintroduced to Lancashire after an absence of 500 years.

Leaving Martin Mere, continue along the road and it will lead you in about 3km back to Burscough.